



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
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# REPORT

## **Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue: *Strengthening trust and embracing hope for our common future***

**Rome, 19-21 June 2025**



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## Introduction

For many years, the IPU has been engaging in parliamentary dialogue and cooperation across religions, beliefs and cultures to promote peace, coexistence and the rule of law. Most important in this regard are the outcome documents of IPU Assemblies, such as the [Quebec City Declaration](#) (2012) on *Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world*, the [St. Petersburg Declaration](#) (2017) on *Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue*, and the [Manama Declaration](#) (2023) on *Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance*.

The IPU's work on parliamentary engagement with religion and belief is part of an "ecosystem" approach outlined in its [2022-2026 Strategy](#), which acknowledges that parliaments and parliamentarians can better deliver for the people when they take note of and work together with the actors and dynamics that influence them, as well as with other relevant stakeholders.

To better understand the relationship between parliaments, parliamentarians and religion and belief, the IPU has produced a first-of-its-kind *Parliamentary report on religion and belief: Working towards more peaceful and inclusive societies* ([Part 1, 2023](#); [Part 2, 2025](#)), which investigates how parliaments and parliamentarians engage with religion and belief to support peace, inclusion and dialogue, and the upholding of human rights and the rule of law. The IPU has been including dedicated sessions on interfaith dialogue in its statutory Assemblies, and has engaged with international networks, religious actors and faith-based organizations to promote inclusive citizenship and social cohesion.

In June 2023, the IPU, together with the Parliament of the Kingdom of Morocco, convened the first-ever global Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue: *Working together for our common future*, which convened parliamentarians, representatives of governments, religions, beliefs, faith-based and civil society organizations, international organizations and academia. The Conference concluded with the [Marrakesh Communiqué](#), in which parliamentarians acknowledged that interfaith dialogue that is "grounded in support of fundamental rights and freedoms is an essential tool for promoting inclusivity and peaceful coexistence, upholding the rule of law and encouraging collective efforts to achieve a better society".

From 19-21 June 2025, during the Jubilee Year of the Catholic Church, the IPU, together with the Parliament of Italy, convened the Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue: *Strengthening trust and embracing hope for our common future*. The Conference took place in the Italian Parliament in Rome and included an audience with the newly elected Pope Leo XIV in the Vatican as part of the Jubilee of Governments. Taking place at a time of global uncertainty and a divided political landscape, the Conference drew strong participation from over 600 MPs and international experts, including young people, from close to 100 countries. Conference sessions included five panels, two thematic working sessions, and a General Debate, and were dedicated to promoting peaceful coexistence and ethical leadership, upholding human rights, countering identity-based discrimination, and fostering hope and solidarity.

The Conference concluded with the [Rome Communiqué](#), in which parliamentarians affirmed that "interfaith dialogue, grounded in human dignity and rights, inclusivity and respect for the rule of law, offers a vital bulwark against dehumanization and polarization. Interfaith dialogue and action strengthen trust between communities and institutions, nurturing the hope needed to jointly build a peaceful and inclusive future."

The IPU's engagement in interfaith dialogue offers parliamentarians a platform to consider their work through the lens of religion and belief, and to harness the potential of faith to promote inclusive, just and peaceful societies.

The following report provides a summary of the sessions and key outcomes of the Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue. More information about IPU work in the area of interfaith dialogue is available on its [dedicated webpage](#).

## Opening ceremony

At the opening ceremony on 19 June 2025, **Mr. Lorenzo Fontana, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy**, welcomed participants to the Conference, which was being hosted by Italy two years after the first Conference in Marrakesh. While that first Conference had emphasized dialogue as a fundamental tool for safeguarding rights and promoting peaceful coexistence, the world remained deeply divided by geopolitical conflicts and growing intolerance. Dialogue was an important means of fostering debate and cooperation, with parliaments having a key role to play in promoting awareness and mutual understanding among religious leaders.

**Mr. Ignazio La Russa, President of the Senate of Italy**, emphasized the critical importance of the Conference in a world grappling with many social, economic and religious divisions. In a world without peace, hope must never be lost. Interfaith dialogue was an essential tool to build strong, lasting bridges of mutual trust, respect and universal fraternity, with the ultimate goal of defeating hate and achieving peace.

**Dr. Tulia Ackson, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union**, highlighted the importance of the Conference in bringing together legislators and religious leaders amid global challenges such as conflict, cultural distortion and discrimination. The IPU had a long-standing commitment to providing a platform for dialogue for peace, security and democracy, and parliamentarians themselves played a crucial role in promoting inclusive societies and utilizing parliamentary diplomacy to foster understanding and mediate conflicts. She urged participants to listen, share and connect during the Conference to combat hatred and discrimination, in the hope of harnessing their collective efforts for a better, more peaceful world.

**Dr. Francis Kuria, Secretary General of Religions for Peace**, emphasized the vital need for cooperation between parliamentarians and religious leaders in a world grappling with conflicts, unfulfilled development goals and rising intolerance. While parliamentarians were the backbone of nations, religious leaders served as moral guides and voices for the voiceless, and their shared goal of prosperity for all would only be possible through active collaboration. He called for a shift from consultation to co-creation and transformational solidarity, urging participants to work together to defend democracy, combat hatred, and build trust for a peaceful common future.

**The Most Reverend Rino Fisichella, Archbishop, Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, Responsible for the 2025 Jubilee, Vatican**, encouraged participants to work to strengthen the trust of citizens in religion, as institutional credibility appeared to be weakening. He expressed the idea that hope was not a utopia but something concrete, and that individual engagement could profoundly impact society and international relations, especially in dramatic times when the voice of politics and diplomacy must be amplified to counter suffering. In his view, the Conference's title, *Strengthening trust and embracing hope for our common future*, signified a tangible path for policymakers to follow.

**Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, Senator, Honorary President of the Inter Parliamentary Union, President of the Italian IPU Group**, said that interfaith dialogue needed to move from theory to reality, and he called upon leaders to speak publicly and frankly on the subject. Referencing Pope John Paul II's call for religions to show their potential for peace by guiding cultures towards mutual understanding, he stressed that dialogue was about acknowledging others' dignity and building active peace, not just the absence of war. He urged participants to engage in a collective effort to understand one another and ensure that justice and balance, not force, would govern global relations, with interfaith dialogue as an act of belief in multilateralism and peaceful coexistence.



## General Debate

### *Parliamentarians in dialogue with religion and belief: Strengthening trust and embracing hope for our common future*



- Opening remarks: - **Ambassador Simona-Mirela Miculescu**, President of the 42nd UNESCO General Conference
- **Mr. Miguel Moratinos**, High Representative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations; former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, former Member of Parliament of Spain
  - **Sayyed Jawad El Khoei**, Secretary-General of the Al-Khoei Institute, Iraq
  - **Archbishop Ioannes Tsafaridis**, Archbishop of Zambia and Mozambique, Orthodox Archdiocese of Zambia and Mozambique

Parliamentarians, representatives of faith communities and faith-based organizations and others met on 20 June 2025 to participate in a general debate entitled *Parliamentarians in dialogue with religion and belief: Strengthening trust and embracing hope for our common future*.

#### Benefits of interfaith dialogue

Significant numbers of participants acknowledged the wide-ranging benefits of interfaith dialogue. For faith communities, these included the contribution of such dialogue to creating legally guaranteed and enforceable rights to practise a religion or belief (including none), in freedom and safety, and on an equal footing with other communities within a country or region.

Some speakers said wider society also benefitted from interfaith dialogue by enabling a State's decisions to be informed by faith-based values. Others saw dialogue as vital for building societies based on justice, freedom and human dignity, and even indispensable to the successful functioning of democracy.

Several participants stressed that the most effective interfaith dialogue involved all of society, from academics and politicians to artists, civil society and others. Such partnerships could contribute to the development of societies with desirable attributes such as: stability, inclusivity, the ability to strengthen democratic institutions, respect for others' traditions and languages, greater cross-community and interpersonal mutual understanding, reduced polarization, the capacity for reconciliation, forgiveness and peacebuilding, and an appreciation of the divine in every person.

## The tripartite role of legislators and cooperation with faith communities and faith-based organizations



Many speakers agreed that the role of politicians to legislate, scrutinize the executive, and authorize budgets was crucial to maintaining and improving the attributes of inclusive and peaceful societies.

For example, some noted that, when fairly executed, MPs' three core duties could lead to greater peace, prosperity, mutual understanding, and good ethical and moral behaviour.

Participants identified that parliamentarians' constituents were often also members of faith communities. MPs and representatives of

faith communities were encouraged to capitalize on that overlap by working in consultative partnership more consistently. For example, they should: jointly use their positions of influence to lead by example, including by demonstrating and promoting tolerance and empathy; integrate the outcomes of interfaith dialogue into policymaking, which could lead to better lawmaking in areas such as justice, freedom and sustainability, and support the growth of trusted and accountable governance; educate each other about their respective roles and the people they represented, so as to help reduce interfaith tensions in constituencies and communities; and replace criticism or denigration of others with offers of mutual support and solutions to shared problems. Some speakers also noted the need (including because of higher migration levels) to legislate for and implement policies that would protect religious or belief minorities and ensure freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief, including for women and girls.

Other participants said that, due to its contribution to creating more positive societies, joint action between MPs, faith communities and faith-based organizations should be pursued further, often in cooperation with other parts of society, including underrepresented groups.

### Institutional actions

#### ***Strengthening existing and creating new institutions***

Participants called for national parliaments, MPs, representatives of faith communities and faith-based organizations to:

- Champion and defend multilateralism, the Charter of the United Nations and its emphasis on tolerance, international law, and the rules-based international order (including as an approach to restoring citizens' trust in their institutions of governance); apply faith-based principles where appropriate to help achieve policy goals in areas such as human rights, gender justice, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, and equality before the law, striking the right balance between rights and responsibilities, and respect for diversity.



- Strengthen interfaith dialogue and similar forms of societal consultation, including with women, young people and marginalized or under-represented faith groups.
- Create permanent institutional processes, structures and mechanisms for continuous, substantive dialogue between legislators and representatives of faith communities and faith-based organizations, with those processes being: driven by data and evidence; mainstreamed into existing decision-making paths; and designed to increase social cohesion, the defence of religious or belief minorities and peaceful coexistence.

Other participants said that the IPU and other international institutions should capitalize on their capacity to plan across electoral cycles by leading on the creation and embedding the permanence of such institutional actions.



### ***Implementing past decisions***

Those involved in interfaith dialogue were called on to support the implementation of various relevant laws, plans, resolutions and initiatives, including: increased funding for peacebuilding organizations working on conflicts that have a faith dimension; and greater support (potentially in the form of an international charter) for the protection and preservation of sacred spaces and religious symbols.



Many participants also recalled the importance of making a reality of the decisions of institutions such as: the IPU (Manama Declaration, Marrakesh Communiqué), United Nations (Pact for the Future Action 55, Bukhara Declaration), European Union and Council of Europe; others highlighted the need to follow up on the conclusions and recommendations of various civil society organizations.

### ***Tackling misinformation***

Speakers encouraged each other to fight against misinformation, divisive language and attempts to scapegoat or dehumanize faith or other communities. Some noted the power of the digital world to amplify fear, polarize opinion and underline difference, which was eroding trust between individuals, institutions and communities, and weakening societal capacity to cooperate trustingly and create shared futures. Part of the solution lay in rediscovering the art of disagreeing agreeably with those who held different views. Artificial intelligence (AI) offered opportunities to engage more meaningfully with other religions, beliefs and cultures, including through machine translation, customized content and predictive data analysis. However, participants also argued for engagement with the technology sector in conjunction with judicious AI legislation and governance structures that would: retain the centrality of the human factor; improve digital literacy; make it as easy to access truthful and reliable online content as it was to access the opposite; promote ethical leadership; and repair trust between individuals, institutions and communities.

### **Actions to change hearts and minds**

Many participants said that, in addition to institutional action, wider societal benefits flowing from principles and rights (such as multilateralism, mutual respect, freedom of conscience, moderate language, and a common recognition of the truth) could only be realized through a change in

people's hearts and minds. That change would make a practical reality of issues such as the central themes of the debate – trust and hope. Many speakers also identified that maintaining or building peace required similar attitudinal change.

Speakers advocated different ways of encouraging such change, including:

- Education and raising awareness to help citizens: appreciate the value of democratic institutions; cultivate empathy, critical thinking and intercultural understanding; replace assumption with fact; and create hope for the future (examples included the IPU-UNESCO [freedom of expression MOOC](#), UNESCO's [recommendation for education and peace](#), and a proposed information directory of world religions).
- Running regular, localized people-to-people interactions to cement interfaith tolerance, especially in relation to women, young people, minorities and marginalized groups.
- Leading by example, including by: passing laws to mandate transparency and integrity among community leaders and foster connections between MPs and constituents; creating social consensus around interfaith dialogue as a necessity; and sharing one's life experiences with neighbours from diverse faith and other traditions.
- Living out a culture of respect and thoughtful listening to all interlocutors, in environments large and small, from parliaments and places of worship to household kitchen tables.



Many speakers also saw parliamentarians and faith communities and faith-based organizations as natural peacebuilding partners, and identified the potential for peace to be resilient and sustainable when different actors worked together across politics, religions, beliefs, cultures, States, and national and international organizations. That joint engagement for peace could be manifested by consistent actions including: identifying shared values and common ground; respecting difference, resisting attempts to attenuate it, and exploring the resultant interplay of new ideas; articulating a sense of global unity as well as interdependence for future planning; and acknowledging the importance of human dignity, fairness and the sanctity of life.

Other contributors called for faith communities to achieve the change of hearts and minds being sought by encouraging pluralistic societies with equal rights and mutual responsibilities for all groups, and a culture of adapting past practices to new social realities.

### Actions focused on faith communities



Many speakers discussed ways to improve the experiences of their faith communities within wider society. For example, some posited that the whole of society, including faith communities, should guard against the misuse of activities of faith communities and faith-based organizations; they should always be free of political influence, while political entities should never instrumentalize religion or belief. Others called on all participants to: make active efforts to end religious extremism; respect holy places; and end all violence carried out in the name of religion or belief.

Speakers also supported fighting any discrimination directed against faith communities, from social prejudice, through legalized ostracism, to violent persecution. Some felt that discrimination could be fought by increasing engagement and dialogue to promote greater interfaith understanding. Others advocated refraining from retaliation, and replacing condemnation with solutions to the problems behind religious persecution.

### Sharing good practices

A large number of speakers cited examples of their countries' good practices that enabled faith communities and faith-based organizations to be treated equally and inclusively, thereby contributing to a more peaceful and inclusive society. Good practices included: governmental support for faith-based education; faith and governmental entities working in partnership to improve public service provision; the passing of parliamentary declarations and similar to enshrine faith-based values in public policy; drawing inspiration from effective faith-based elements of past peacebuilding efforts; extending interfaith dialogue through the greater and novel use of existing interfaith institutions; and establishing highly localized community dialogue, particularly through women-led initiatives, to address religious or other divisions.

Other speakers highlighted ways in which their national traditions, legal frameworks or other public policy interventions contributed to guaranteed freedoms and good community relations, including in a faith-based context. For example, certain participants noted that: seats in their legislature were reserved for faith and/or other minority groups; their national constitution or other legal framework guaranteed faith-based freedoms; there were national laws banning discrimination against individuals or groups on the basis of religion, belief or other characteristics, as well as laws banning faith-based or other forms of extremism; the secularity of the State guaranteed equal treatment of all faith communities under the law; inclusively consulting faith and other communities was an institutionalized element of public decision-making; interfaith tolerance was taught within the education system; their history demonstrated a long record of coexistence between different faith and other communities; an interfaith dialogue institution existed and was active; various faith communities had committed to working together; and there were cultural events or special days dedicated to celebrating faith-based elements of society.

### Campaign advocacy

Several speakers advocated for particular causes, sometimes calling on parliaments, faith communities and faith-based organizations to, as appropriate: pass resolutions, bring petitions to international organizations, issue statements of support or similar. Several speakers expressed



grave concern about the conflict and humanitarian situation in Gaza. Some called for improvements in the position of women and girls in Afghanistan, while others raised cases of the alleged mistreatment in some countries of communities, including Ahmadi and Baha'i Muslims, Christians, Hazaras, humanists and Jews. Other situations of concern included: the impact on freedom of speech of legislation regulating online spaces; and reproductive rights and end-of-life care.

## High-level panel

### *Countering hatred based on religion or belief: Deescalating polarization, preventing dehumanization and religious weaponization*

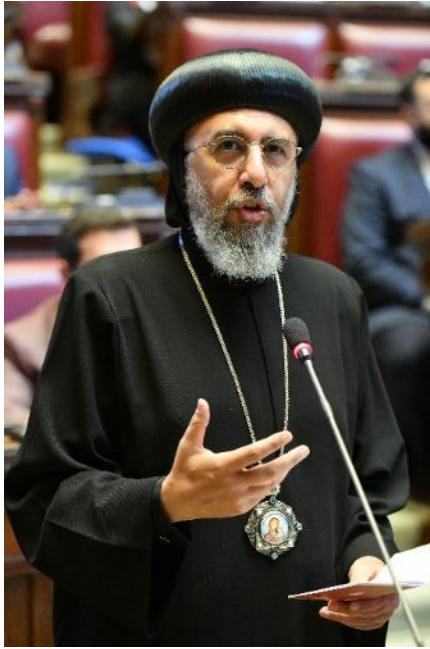


- Co-Moderators:
- **Mr. Maurizio Lupi**, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy, Vice-President of the Italian IPU Group
  - **Ms. Şafak Pavey**, Special Envoy, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, former Deputy Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye

- Panellists:
- **His Eminence Cardinal George Jacob Koovakad**, Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue
  - **Dr. Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi**, Chairman of the Manara Center for Coexistence and Dialogue and Member of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates
  - **Rabbi David Rosen**, Chief Rabbi; Co-President, Religions for Peace (video message)
  - **Archbishop Angaelos**, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London
  - **Imam Yahyâ S.Y. Pallavicini**, Chairman of the European Muslim Leaders' Majlis (EULEMA); Member of the European Council of Religious Leaders - Religions for Peace
  - **Dr. Nazila Ghanea**, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and Professor of International Human Rights Law at Oxford University
  - **Ms. Uswatun Hasanah**, Eco Bhinneka Surakarta, Indonesia

This high-level panel explored the many ways in which legislators and religious leaders can serve as bridge-builders between divided communities to promote peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. Based on reflections from parliamentary representatives, religious leaders, human rights experts and youth activists, the discussion covered how collaboration across these sectors can help deescalate polarization, prevent dehumanization, and resist the instrumentalization of religion for political ends.

Legislators and religious leaders both have unique forms of influence – one grounded in their political mandate, the other in moral or spiritual authority. Together, they are well-positioned to foster trust, uphold fundamental freedoms, and support the gradual development of more inclusive societies. Interfaith dialogue was identified as a helpful tool in promoting mutual understanding and countering fear and division, especially when guided by shared values such as human dignity, compassion and responsibility toward others.



Several participants underscored the fact that religion should not be compartmentalized away from the social or political life of communities, particularly in regions where belief is integral to identity. Rather than seeing religion as a source of conflict, the panel highlighted its potential to inspire solidarity, ethical leadership and a long-term commitment to peace. Cooperation between legislators and religious leaders was viewed not as a symbolic gesture but as a practical necessity in societies striving for stability and cohesion.

Participants emphasised that this collaboration must be grounded in honest, pragmatic dialogue, requiring the setting aside of political or doctrinal competition and recognizing the complementary roles each actor plays. Religious leaders were encouraged to offer clear and consistent moral guidance, while legislators were reminded

of their responsibility to listen to all communities, not only those that reflect their own backgrounds or beliefs.

A key theme was the importance of engaging young people, women and minorities in these efforts. Intergenerational and inclusive dialogue was seen as essential to building resilience in societies facing complex challenges – from digital disinformation to socio-political fragmentation. Young people were described not merely as future leaders but as current contributors to peacebuilding, especially when empowered to shape narratives and take part in policymaking processes.



In moving forward, the panel called for broader access to interfaith and intercultural dialogue, greater inclusion of marginalized voices, and stronger connections between local initiatives and global efforts. When legislators and religious leaders work together with sincerity and shared purpose, they can help shape societies rooted in justice, mutual respect and lasting peace.



## Panel 1

### *Advancing inclusive societies, ensuring freedom of religion or belief*



- Moderator: - **Ms. Tanya Awad Ghorra**, Senior Trainer on Diversity and Inclusive Citizenship and Board Member at Adyan Foundation, Lebanon
- Panellists:
- **Ms. Fernanda San Martín Carrasco**, Director of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, former member of Parliament of Bolivia
  - **Professor Ahmed Shaheed**, Professor of International Human Rights Law in the School of Law and Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex, former UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief
  - **Rabbi David Saperstein**, Senior Advisor for Policy, Union for Reform Judaism; former Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, US Department of State
  - **Ms. Bani Dugal**, Representative to the UN for the Baha'i International Community; Co-President, Religions for Peace
  - **Dr. Michael Wiener**, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

This panel explored how parliaments, religious actors and civil society can act in unison to advance freedom of religion or belief as a foundation for peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Speakers emphasized that freedom of religion or belief is not just a legal principle but a practical condition for development, social cohesion and human dignity. Ensuring this right requires parliamentarians to adopt a holistic approach that integrates gender equality, addresses intersecting forms of discrimination, and respects the dignity of both individuals and communities – whether religious or not.

Panellists highlighted the interconnection between freedom of religion or belief, alongside all other rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as its critical role in preventing exclusion, coercion and violence. They called on parliamentarians to use their powers to review laws through a human rights lens, invest in policies that foster inter-community trust and support peer-learning initiatives. Religious leaders were recognized for their unique capacity to model

coexistence, counter fear, suspicion and religious supremacism, and build resilience when they engage in dialogue, cooperation and joint humanitarian action. Examples from Ethiopia, Indonesia and Morocco showed how inclusive local initiatives, training of faith leaders, and collaborative efforts between the State and religious communities can heal historical divisions and promote mutual respect.

The discussion also explored tools such as the #Faith4Rights toolkit, which enables a participatory and effective soft-law approach to tackling the root causes of human rights violations, including media incitement and gender-based discrimination. Youth inclusion, spiritual education, and an effort to ensure that religious texts are interpreted in ways that align with human rights were emphasized as key strategies to minimize the high costs of hate crime, counter extremism and foster unity in diversity.

To turn principles into progress, participants urged parliamentarians to join platforms such as the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB), integrate freedom of religion or belief across policy domains, and champion inclusive dialogue at all levels. Concrete steps include: investing in community-building initiatives; embedding freedom of religion or belief in national development agendas and education systems; and ensuring all voices – including women, youth and all minorities – are heard. In a time of deepening divisions and multiplying conflicts, advancing freedom of religion or belief is not just a matter of justice, but of building a common peaceful future grounded in dignity, trust and hope.



## Panel 2

### *Promoting ethical leadership at all levels, investing in education for peace*



- Moderator: - **Dr. Fadi Daou**, Executive Director of Globethics
- Panellists:
- **Ambassador Simona-Mirela Miculescu**, President of the 42nd UNESCO General Conference
  - **Ms. Hala Fayez**, Member of the Shura Council, Bahrain
  - **Dr. Ibrahim Negm**, Senior Advisor to the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Secretary General of the General Secretariat for Fatwa Authorities Worldwide
  - **Dr. Chinmay Pandya**, Chairperson, South Asian Institute of Peace and Reconciliation, Pro Vice-Chancellor at the Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, India
  - **Ms. Joy Muthoni Gitau**, Executive Director, Amani Communities Africa

This panel explored the intersection between ethical leadership and peace education as essential pillars for just, inclusive and cohesive societies. Speakers from diverse regions and sectors emphasized that leadership grounded in values such as integrity, accountability, inclusion and solidarity must be nurtured intentionally – through education, community engagement and personal example.

The panel affirmed that the current state of the world is a reflection of the leadership it has produced. In a time marked by conflict, polarization and loss of trust in institutions, ethical leadership is not a luxury but a necessity. It must be practised at all levels – political, spiritual, educational and social – and grounded in service to the common good.

A recurring theme was the importance of peace education as a foundation for ethical leadership. Peace is not taught only in classrooms, nor is it a theoretical concept. It must be cultivated in homes, institutions and daily life. Education must promote values-based learning, foster critical thinking, and equip individuals to resist manipulation, hate speech and division. Formal curricula that include ethics, religious literacy and media literacy were seen as vital to this effort.

Speakers warned against the instrumentalization of religion or politics to justify violence. They underscored the need for leaders who promote coexistence, uphold dignity, and listen with humility. Peace, they argued, does not emerge from declarations but from a consistent commitment to dialogue, empathy and shared responsibility.



Several examples were shared of national and grassroots efforts to institutionalize peace education and develop value-driven leadership. These included leadership training for young people, educational programmes focused on reconciliation and human rights, and proposals for dedicated institutions and agendas to advance ethical leadership. Across the board, panellists stressed the urgent need to invest in young people as agents of change and to create inclusive spaces, online and offline, where all feel respected and heard.

The discussion also mentioned that ethical leadership begins with self-awareness. Participants spoke of the need to educate future leaders not only in governance or law, but in how to live together, how to serve, and how to lead with compassion. Leadership, in this view, is not about holding power, but about inspiring trust and guiding others through complexity with courage and principle.

In closing, participants agreed that peace and ethical leadership must be cultivated early, deliberately and systemically. These are not ideals to be pursued only in times of stability. They are the very conditions for lasting peace. The final message of the panel was clear: education is the seedbed of ethical leadership, and every individual, regardless of role or background, has a part to play in nurturing it.



## Panel 3

### *Interfaith dialogue for the inclusion of women in public life*



Moderator: - **Ms. Nihal Saad**, Director, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

Panellists: - **Ms. Cynthia López Castro**, Senator of Mexico, President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians  
- **Ms. Aminatou Ngangoube**, Senator, Cameroon  
- **Professor Jagbir Jhutti-Johal**, Professor of Sikh Studies, co-founder of the Women's Faith Forum; member of the ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief  
- **Dr. Thiago Alves Pinto**, Lecturer in Legal Studies and Diplomatic Studies, Director of Studies in Religion and Theology, Oxford University  
- **Ms. Stella Attah**, Peacebuilding Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Tearfund

This panel examined the role of interfaith dialogue in promoting the inclusion of women in public life, encompassing both political institutions and religious or belief communities. Drawing on experiences from various regions, participants examined persistent barriers and shared practices that have proven effective in enabling women to participate in shaping public discourse.

As of January 2025, women held 27% of parliamentary seats globally, up from 13.1% in 2000. In parliamentary elections held across 59 countries in 2024, women accounted for 26.5% of those elected. While this marks progress, speakers underlined the limitations of representation in the absence of real influence or protection. Quotas, legal commitments, and gender-sensitive mechanisms remain essential for addressing this imbalance and protecting women's access to public roles.

A recurring theme of the panel was the impact of violence, including online gender-based violence, which often targets women in politics. On top of this, disinformation and digital harassment have pushed some women to resign from elected positions altogether.

The panellists also stressed that women of faith were already leading within their communities, but often outside formal structures. Their presence in interfaith dialogue is not just a matter of justice but also a question of visibility and influence. When excluded from these conversations, their perspectives, as well as the communities they represent, are also silenced. Dialogue between women politicians and women of faith was also seen as a promising avenue for solidarity and shared advocacy.

The panel noted that, in regions where religion heavily influences social norms and collective behaviour, the engagement of religious leaders can make or break inclusive progress: religious discourse can either uphold or undermine efforts to open public spaces for women. In such contexts, interfaith dialogue was seen as a critical entry point for shifting narratives and building broader societal support.

Another key concern was the underrepresentation of women among those invited to participate in interfaith forums. Religious leadership remains predominantly male, limiting both the scope and legitimacy of such dialogue. The panel called for a deliberate broadening of participation to include female faith actors and subject-matter experts. Representation must also translate into meaningful engagement: women must be taken seriously when they speak and not just be invited to fill quotas.

Interventions from the floor echoed the main themes: that inclusion cannot be reduced to numbers alone, and that discriminatory legal frameworks continue to restrict women's rights unevenly, even within a single faith. Some countries reported promising levels of female representation in elected office; others described persistent gaps, lack of party support and social stigma.

The panel concluded that the inclusion of women in both political and religious life is essential to building more just and cohesive societies. Interfaith dialogue can serve as a powerful lever, but only if it actively includes women as equal participants and leaders.



## Panel 4

### *Fostering solidarity and action for people in vulnerable situations*



Moderator: - **Ms. Claire Thomas**, Executive Director of Minority Rights Group

Panellists:

- **Mr. Gerardo Fernández Noroña**, President of the Senate of Mexico
- **Dr. Katherine Marshall**, Senior Fellow, the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Board Member of the G20 Interfaith Forum
- **Ms. Michèle Bowe**, Head of the Representative Office of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the State of Palestine
- **Mr. Khushwant Singh**, Head of Secretariat, International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development
- **Priestess Beatriz Schulthess**, President, Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council (Costa Rica) and member of the UNHCR-Religions for Peace Multi-religious Council of Leaders

This panel explored how parliaments, religious leaders and other stakeholders can work together to promote solidarity and concrete action for people in vulnerable situations. The panel agreed on the terminology “people in vulnerable situations” rather than “vulnerable people”, since every person is inherently vulnerable.

Speakers stressed the importance of including marginalized groups – such as indigenous peoples, displaced populations, persons with disabilities, and religious minorities – in both emergency responses and long-term policy planning. They called attention to the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza as an urgent case requiring international attention, a ceasefire and humanitarian access, urging participants to move beyond abstract references to peace and instead focus on tangible political and humanitarian action.

A recurring theme was the importance of bringing religious voices into global policy agendas. Religious actors and communities are often the first to respond to crisis and the last to leave, yet their role is frequently overlooked in development frameworks. The panel underscored the value of structured partnerships between parliaments and religious institutions, with an emphasis on

transparency, mutual respect and shared goals. Participants called for deeper engagement with faith-based actors to deliver social services, spiritual care and community cohesion – particularly in contexts that State institutions struggle to reach.

Speakers also challenged the notion that charity alone is sufficient. They argued for a more integrated approach that balances compassion with long-term empowerment. This includes recognizing the dignity of work, promoting economic inclusion, and ensuring access to education and healthcare. At the same time, they warned that modern systems – including global education and artificial intelligence – can perpetuate Western-centric norms and threaten diverse cultures and traditions if not approached thoughtfully.

Several overlooked or underrepresented groups were discussed, including indigenous peoples, who are often labelled as poor despite their resilience and knowledge systems; young people facing chronic unemployment; pensioners living in precarious conditions; and people with disabilities, who make up over 10% of the population yet are frequently excluded from policy-making processes. The vulnerability of minority cultures and spiritual traditions was also noted, with participants calling for recognition of non-Western forms of knowledge and belief.

There was a call for inclusion laws, which sometimes already existed in the form of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, which can be a cornerstone of national efforts to ensure equity and social cohesion. Such legislation is essential not only to prohibit direct and indirect discrimination across all sectors of life, but also to create the legal tools necessary for redress and accountability. Participants stressed that, without clear legal frameworks to combat systemic bias – whether based on ethnicity, religion, gender, disability or other status – efforts to foster solidarity risked remaining aspirational. Robust anti-discrimination laws help shift societies from tolerance to genuine inclusion and equal participation.

Finally, the panel concluded that the most powerful contributions religious leaders and legislators can make are to focus on people who are left behind. Solidarity must go beyond coexistence: it requires trust, teamwork and the political will to embed inclusion in law and practice. All religions converge around shared values of compassion, justice and human dignity. These values must be the foundation for concrete, coordinated efforts to ensure that no one is excluded from the benefits of development or denied their fundamental rights.



## Thematic working session 1

### *Promoting peaceful coexistence*

- Moderator: - **Ms. Deepika Singh**, Deputy Secretary General of Religions for Peace
- Panellists:
- **Ms. Mónica Bartos**, Member of the National Assembly, Hungary
  - **Mr. Abdulla Almanai**, Executive Director, King Hamad Global Center for Coexistence and Tolerance (Bahrain)
  - **Professor Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia OBE KSG**, Spiritual Leader and Chair, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha; Co-President and Trustee, Religions for Peace International
  - **Ms. Radi Lamia**, Founding President, Mémoires pour l'Avenir Foundation (Morocco)
  - **Mr. Issa Toha Shamsoo**, Founder and Executive Director, African Students for Interfaith Tolerance (Ghana)



This working session examined the roles of parliamentarians, religious leaders and civil society in fostering peaceful coexistence and preventing radicalization. Participants emphasized that achieving sustainable peace required the root causes of tensions to be addressed, and proposed practical, inclusive strategies to build resilient, just and harmonious societies.

The panellists highlighted that many conflicts perceived as religious were rooted in marginalization, social frustration and hopelessness, necessitating interventions that addressed these underlying causes. Reconciliation at individual, community and national levels was presented as being essential to sustainable peace. Examples included formal acts of forgiveness between States for historical wrongs, and inclusive local initiatives aimed at fostering meaningful conversations. Development initiatives could promote inter-community cooperation and prevent conflict, while structured educational programmes from early childhood and global conferences could translate dialogue into concrete strategies.

Religions and beliefs were emphasized as valuable resources in efforts to overcome conflicts and social tensions, helping to foster resilience in divided communities. Inclusive engagement emerged as an important pillar of coexistence. Religious leaders were recognized for their unique capacity to model dialogue, counter suspicion and fear, and strengthen resilience through cooperative action. Participants highlighted the vital role of youth, women and local influencers in shaping peaceful societies, citing initiatives such as youth interfaith parliaments, digital dialogue platforms and historical memory projects.

The session concluded with a consensus on the importance of action-oriented and context-sensitive approaches: supporting youth-led initiatives, embedding coexistence education into national curricula, fostering interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and creating platforms for marginalized voices. Transforming the principles of coexistence into measurable social progress would depend on inclusive and practical engagement founded on dignity, trust and mutual understanding.



## Thematic working session 2

### ***Lessons from the Marrakesh Declaration (2016): Upholding the rights of religious minorities***

Organized by the IPU with support from Religions for Peace, the Abu Dhabi Peace Forum and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

- Moderator: - **Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi**, Executive Director, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Commissioner
- Panellists: - **Sheikh Al-Mahfoudh Bin Bayyah**, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace  
- **Dr. Katherine Marshall**, Senior Fellow, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University, Board Member of the G20 Interfaith Forum  
- **Mr. Robert Amuma Madubi**, Founder of Badili Tana Initiative (Kenya)



This working session focused on the *Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in the Muslim World* (2016) and its contribution to promoting freedom of religion or belief, fostering peaceful coexistence and strengthening inclusive governance. Participants highlighted the importance of translating theological principles into practical frameworks for interfaith collaboration, policymaking and community engagement, while outlining pathways to strengthen these globally.

The Medina Charter of 622 CE affirmed religious diversity and coexistence and provided a framework to prevent the misuse of religion to justify violence and to promote inclusive citizenship in contemporary governance. 1400 years later, the Marrakesh Declaration reiterated that religion – specifically Islam – could play a constructive role in strengthening social cohesion, minority protection, and broader development and peacebuilding efforts. Integrating religious literacy and meaningful religious engagement into governance was underscored as essential for building resilience and developing effective policy, particularly in fragile or conflict-affected contexts.

The session further explored how policymakers and religious leaders could institutionalize these principles. Special attention was given to the transformative roles of women and young people in fostering tolerance and coexistence. Practical examples, including the Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA), youth-led dialogue circles, and conflict mediation by religious and community leaders, illustrated how safeguarding minority rights strengthened communities and reinforced societal stability.

The session concluded by reaffirming the Marrakesh Declaration as a living framework for advancing religious freedom, minority rights and inclusive citizenship. Participants called on parliaments to invest in education programmes, maintain sustained engagement with religious, community and political leaders, and ensure consistent follow-up, emphasizing that such measures were critical for translating the Marrakesh Declaration's principles into tangible impact at both local and national levels.



## Rome Communiqué



We, parliamentarians from around the world, have convened in Rome with representatives of religions and beliefs, faith-based and other civil society organizations, academia and international experts, for the Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue. The Conference has been organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliament of Italy, with the support of Religions for Peace, and is taking place during the Year of Jubilee called by the late Pope Francis. It follows the first Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue held in Marrakesh in 2023 and carries forward and builds on the spirit and aspirations of the Marrakesh Communiqué.

We meet at a time of deep uncertainty, marked by escalating conflicts and violence between States and communities, increasing disillusionment with multilateralism, the erosion of the rules-based international order, challenges to democratic institutions and human rights norms, and anxiety about the future and health of our planet. This crisis of solidarity and accountability calls for society as a whole to come together for peace. This moment calls on us to deepen our resolve and our efforts, not only to reaffirm our shared commitments but to consolidate our resolve to build our common future.

We reject the misuse of religions or beliefs or the manipulation of their followers to incite hatred and violence, for example for electoral purposes or political gains. When religion or belief is used to set up or deepen fault lines, it undermines public trust, endangers lives, and weakens the very principles of dignity and equality that sustain peaceful societies. This diverts it from the power it has for building bridges of understanding and cross-community compassion and solidarity.

We are especially concerned about toxic language and narratives that discriminate against and dehumanize individuals or communities based on religion or belief, often amplified by digital technologies that are increasingly used to divide societies and scapegoat communities.

In the face of these challenges, we affirm that interfaith dialogue, grounded in human dignity and rights, inclusivity and respect for the rule of law, offers a vital bulwark against dehumanization and polarization. Interfaith dialogue and action strengthen trust between communities and institutions, nurturing the hope needed to jointly build a peaceful and inclusive future.

Trust and hope are not abstract ideals but practical necessities. Trust – in institutions, between communities, including those of different religious or belief persuasions, and in public leadership in every sphere and at every level of society – strengthens social cohesion. Hope – for justice, dignity and inclusion – sustains belief in the possibility of a better tomorrow. We believe that interfaith dialogue is a powerful tool to prevent division, foster healing, and build our shared future.

We further affirm that human dignity remains the foundation of peace. Every person, regardless of their religion, belief, ethnicity or gender, deserves respect and equal treatment. Upholding this dignity, which guarantees an environment in which humans can flourish, and certainly includes the right to live free from violence, discrimination and exclusion, is the cornerstone of all efforts to promote justice, peace and sustainable development.

We recognize the essential role of parliamentary and religious diplomacy in fostering dialogue, cooperation and trust between communities. While parliamentarians and religious leaders serve different mandates, both are responsible for advancing justice, promoting dignity and supporting human development. Dialogue and cooperation between them – when principled, inclusive and rights-based – contributes to more resilient and cohesive societies.

Parliamentarians can and must uphold democratic values and inclusive governance for all. Through their law-making, budgetary, oversight and representational roles, they must protect the human rights of all, including those most vulnerable to discrimination – among them women, youth, forcibly displaced people, religious or belief minorities, Indigenous Peoples, asylum seekers and refugees, and marginalized groups.

As public figures, parliamentarians contribute to shaping public opinion and discourse – as can religious and belief representatives or leaders, who often serve as sources of moral guidance, social service delivery and conflict mediation. We therefore emphasize the need for ethical, strong and responsible leadership – rooted in inclusion, equality, respect, justice, integrity, trust, accountability, solidarity and compassion. Such leadership, when grounded in service to the common good, is essential for building trust in institutions and fostering cohesive, resilient societies.

We further acknowledge the vital role of education for peace in equipping societies with the tools to think critically, engage empathetically, and resist fear-based and divisive rhetoric. We call for sustained investment in peer learning and other initiatives that promote digital and human rights literacy and interfaith understanding, as fundamental to the roles of both parliamentarians and religious or belief representatives and leaders.

We commit to doing our part in efforts to deescalate polarization and protect civic space by denouncing and dismantling religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence – in politics, media, education and religious discourse. We further commit to addressing discriminatory laws, and any form of exclusion or violence targeting individuals and communities.

We reaffirm that freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, including the right to change one's belief, is a universal and inalienable human right which has been enshrined in international law within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966). Yet no society is free from violations of this right, and individuals and communities continue to face discrimination, persecution or restrictions based on their religion or belief. We highlight the role of parliaments in safeguarding this right through fostering inclusive citizenship, grassroots understanding, educational efforts, and legal protections in their domestic legal systems, including through the adoption of comprehensive anti-discrimination laws.

We reaffirm the full and equal rights of women and girls, who often face intersecting forms of discrimination, including those justified in the name of religion, belief or tradition. We recognize the critical roles of women in political and religious life and highlight the importance of their inclusion in interfaith dialogue and in key roles in promoting peaceful coexistence. We welcome the progress made in increasing women's representation in parliament and affirm the importance of continued efforts to overcome gender-based barriers and ensure the full participation of women in public life. We deplore recent attempts to roll back this progress.

We acknowledge the indispensable role of faith communities in supporting people in vulnerable situations. We support partnerships between parliamentarians and religious or belief communities to uphold the human rights and dignity of all on an equal basis, including those belonging to marginalized groups.

Finally, we recognize that young people, as agents of peace and interfaith understanding, must be empowered to shape the decisions about the future they are set to inherit through opportunities for meaningful participation and action for society and the health of our planet.

We encourage all parliaments to undertake the following actions:

- **Strengthen provisions for freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief** and other human rights in law and in practice, ensuring equal treatment and protection for all, regardless of religious affiliation or belief system.
- **Counter hate speech, polarizing and dehumanizing narratives and the weaponization of religion or belief** by speaking out against toxic language, promoting inclusive public discourse – including by engaging with both traditional and social media – and adopting measures that punish advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, while protecting freedom of expression and applying the threshold test of the [Rabat Plan of Action](#).
- **Counter digital threats to democracy and human dignity**, including disinformation, online hate speech, and the manipulation of public opinion, and promote responsible use of digital platforms and AI by advocating for robust regulation that ensures these technologies uphold democratic values and respect for human rights, and protect public trust. The [IPU Charter on the Ethics of Science and Technology](#) is intended to serve as a powerful tool in this regard.
- **Foster ethical leadership** rooted in justice, compassion, integrity, humility and the common good, ensuring transparency, accountability, responsible governance and service to the public.
- **Establish or enhance parliamentary bodies and mechanisms** dedicated to interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and promote structured engagement with religious and faith-based actors.
- **Support peace education and religious literacy initiatives**, including through dedicated curricula that promote inclusion, empathy, critical thinking and respect for human rights, starting from an early age.
- **Engage with religious representatives and leaders and faith-based actors** in the process of addressing areas of possible tensions between some interpretations of religious traditions and human rights.
- **Ensure meaningful and inclusive participation by women, youth, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations** in political, cultural, religious, social, economic and public life, and take firm action against gender-based discrimination and violence.
- **Participate in the IPU campaigns** [Achieving gender equality, action by action](#), and [I Say Yes to Youth in Parliament!](#)
- **Safeguard civic space** and engage with civil society, including faith-based organizations, to co-create solutions to societal challenges.
- **Protect and respect places of worship**, as they link to people's identities and generate shared connections, pilgrimages and multifaith spiritual experiences.
- **Engage with the IPU's work on religion and belief**, as a platform for parliamentary engagement on [interfaith dialogue](#).
- **Enhance parliamentary and multi-stakeholder diplomacy**, including faith and civil society leaders and other societal actors, as recommended by the [Pact for the Future](#) (Action 55) to collaboratively promote peace and inclusion globally.
- **Consider organizing a dedicated session in parliament on interfaith dialogue** with representatives of all religious and belief communities in the country concerned.
- **Contribute to international efforts to develop guidelines for peaceful coexistence.**

We commend the IPU for its substantive contribution to interfaith dialogue for peaceful societies and encourage it to further integrate this dimension into its regular programme of work.

We thank the Parliament of Italy for its leadership and hospitality in hosting this historic gathering. We express our appreciation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Vatican, Religions for Peace, and all partners for sustaining this important global dialogue.

We leave Rome inspired by the spirit of hope and solidarity that has defined this Conference. We call on all participants to carry that spirit into their parliaments, their communities and the broader world.



## Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

### Opening remarks



Excellencies,  
Honourable Members of Parliament,  
Esteemed religious leaders,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear friends,

It is a great honour to address you as the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the global organization of national parliaments.

I would like to thank our gracious hosts, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of Italy, for welcoming us to Rome. It is quite a remarkable thing for us to be here during this Jubilee year, to have the privilege to sit in your magnificent debating chamber for two days and to meet with leaders of religions, beliefs, civil society and international experts from around the world.

This Conference provides us with an opportunity to discuss how we, as legislators, alongside all other actors of goodwill, can work together for our common future. And then for us all, people of all religions, beliefs and faiths, to attend an audience with the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, united in our joint commitment to the common good.

But why are we, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, instigating this conversation between national parliaments and representatives of the global religion and belief community? And why now?

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is not only the global organization of national parliaments, it is the oldest political multilateral organization in the world, and has been around for 136 years. The IPU has seen the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the first and second world wars, the creation of the League of Nations and the United Nations, the breakdown of colonialism, the emergence of modern nation States, the Cold War, and every other global conflict, natural disaster and moment of triumph and loss since 1889. Our commitment throughout all of this has been to be a convener, to provide a platform for dialogue for the sake of peace and for the promotion of democracy, for everyone.

But dialogue cannot take place in echo chambers. And democracy thrives on inclusivity and vibrant exchange.

The IPU's current Strategy encourages parliaments to engage with their broader ecosystems, with all of society.

That is precisely what this Conference aims to do.

We recognize that we are facing very difficult times. Our societies are being torn apart by different crises – conflicts are being fought both online and offline, with words and with weapons. It is not just our common future that is at stake: it is our here and now. We are being called upon to come together not just to safeguard a future for our children, but also to protect the rights and livelihoods of our parents and peers.

Parliamentarians have an essential role to play in the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies. It is our job to uphold the rule of law, human rights and justice through our functions of representation, oversight, budgetary approval and legislation. Recently, we have begun to speak more of a fifth function of MPs – parliamentary diplomacy. This is a tool to leverage the potential of our networks and expertise, beyond national borders, to promote dialogue, understanding and cooperation, and even to mediate conflicts.

Representatives of religions and beliefs are important dialogue partners for parliamentarians. Religion and belief provide answers to many questions: they inform our values and give our lives meaning. Religious leaders are people of influence and religious organizations care for the needy and elderly, and educate our children.

Ladies and gentlemen, political and religious actors may have different mandates, but we are all concerned citizens, and are united by shared values such as peace, respect, equality, humanity, fraternity, sorority, accountability and compassion, as well as a commitment to working for the good of our constituents, congregants and broader society.

Many of us here today are leaders in our communities. As our societies become more fragmented, it falls to us to be responsible guides, and advocates of justice and peace.

Gathered here in Rome, we will seize this unique opportunity to see how dialogue can inform national policies and legislation, how we can identify avenues to uphold the equal rights and dignity of all, and how we can combat all forms of hatred and discrimination and foster social cohesion.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to express my appreciation for how far many of you have come to be here today, and to recognize your belief in the importance of talking across national, party and religious lines, and of sharing your expertise for the common good.

I would like to ask all of you here today to make three commitments for your time at this Conference:

- Be willing to listen, because in every exchange there is a space for learning.
- Be willing to share, so that others may benefit from the expertise in which you have invested so much.
- Be ready to reach out. The pool of expertise here is exceptional. Our experts will spark your curiosity, but one short speech from the podium cannot satisfy it. I urge you to connect with each other and draw on the wealth of talent that is assembled here today.

In the last week, as we have watched with great sadness and concern the escalation of hostilities in the Middle East. The closed airspace has also prevented a number of parliamentarians, panellists and young people, many people working for peace in difficult circumstances, from being with us today. I hope that their forced absence may give us even stronger impetus in our deliberations for peace.

I want to wish you all fruitful deliberations.

My greatest wish for this Conference is that we can work together in a space of mutual respect and in the spirit of our common humanity.

I thank you for listening.



## Address of Pope Leo XIV to Members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union



Madam President of the Council of Ministers,  
and Mr President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Republic of Italy,  
Madam President and Mr Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,  
Distinguished Representatives of Academic Institutions and Religious Leaders,

I am pleased that we can meet in the context of the Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, during the present Jubilee of Governments. I offer a warm greeting to the members of the Delegations coming from sixty-eight different countries, and, in a particular way, the Presidents of the respective Parliamentary Institutions.

Politics has rightly been defined as “the highest form of charity,” quoting [Pope Pius XI](#) (*Address to the Italian Catholic University Federation*, 18 December 1927). Indeed, if we consider the service that political life renders to society and to the common good, it can truly be seen as an act of Christian love, which is never simply a theory, but always a concrete sign and witness of God’s constant concern for the good of our human family (cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter [Fratelli Tutti](#), 176-192).

In this regard, I would like to share with you this morning three considerations that I deem important in the current cultural context.

The first concerns your responsibility to promote and protect, independent of any special interest, *the good of the community, the common good*, particularly by defending the vulnerable and the marginalized. This would mean, for example, working to overcome the unacceptable disproportion between the immense wealth concentrated in the hands of a few and the world’s poor (cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter [Rerum Novarum](#), 15 May 1891, 1). Those who live in extreme conditions cry out to make their voices heard, and often find no ears willing to hear their plea. This imbalance generates situations of persistent injustice, which readily lead to violence and, sooner or later, to the tragedy of war. Sound politics, on the other hand, by promoting the equitable distribution of resources, can offer an effective service to harmony and peace both domestically and internationally.

My second reflection has to do with *religious freedom and interreligious dialogue*. This area has taken on greater significance in the present time, and political life can achieve much by encouraging the conditions for there to be authentic religious freedom and that a respectful and constructive encounter between different religious communities may develop. Belief in God, with

the positive values that derive from it, is an immense source of goodness and truth for the lives of individuals and communities. Saint Augustine spoke of the need to pass from *amor sui* – egotistic, myopic and destructive self-love – to *amor Dei* – a free and generous love, grounded in God and leading to the gift of self. That passage, he taught, is essential for the building of the *civitas Dei*, a society whose fundamental law is charity (cf. *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 28).

In order to have a shared point of reference in political activity, and not exclude *a priori* any consideration of the transcendent in decision-making processes, it would be helpful to seek an element that unites everyone. To this end, an essential reference point is the *natural law*, written not by human hands, but acknowledged as valid in all times and places, and finding its most plausible and convincing argument in nature itself. In the words of Cicero, already an authoritative exponent of this law in antiquity, I quote from *De Re Publica*: “Natural law is right reason, in accordance with nature, universal, constant and eternal, which with its commands, invites us to do what is right and with its prohibitions deters us from evil... No change may be made to this law, nor may any part of it be removed, nor can it be abolished altogether; neither by the Senate nor by the people, can we free ourselves from it, nor is it necessary to seek its commentator or interpreter. And there shall be no law in Rome, none in Athens, none now, none later; but one eternal and unchanging law shall govern all peoples at all times” (III, 22).

Natural law, which is universally valid apart from and above other more debatable beliefs, constitutes the compass by which to take our bearings in legislating and acting, particularly on the delicate and pressing ethical issues that, today more than in the past, regard personal life and privacy.

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, approved and proclaimed by the United Nations on 10 December 1948, is now part of humanity’s cultural heritage. That text, which is always relevant, can contribute greatly to placing the human person, in his or her inviolable integrity, at the foundation of the quest for truth, thus restoring dignity to those who do not feel respected in their inmost being and in the dictates of their conscience.

This brings us to a third consideration. The degree of civilization attained in our world and the goals you are charged to achieve are now facing a major challenge in the form of artificial intelligence. This is a development that will certainly be of great help to society, provided that its employment does not undermine the identity and dignity of the human person and his or her fundamental freedoms. In particular, it must not be forgotten that artificial intelligence functions as a tool for the good of human beings, not to diminish them, not to replace them. What is emerging is in fact a significant challenge, one that calls for great attention and foresight in order to project, also in the context of new scenarios, healthy, fair and sound lifestyles, especially for the good of younger generations.

Our personal life has greater value than any algorithm, and social relationships require spaces for development that far transcend the limited patterns that any soulless machine can pre-package. Let us not forget that, while able to store millions of data points and answer many questions in a matter of seconds, artificial intelligence remains equipped with a “static memory” that is in no way comparable to that of human beings. Our memory, on the other hand, is creative, dynamic, generative, capable of uniting past, present and future in a lively and fruitful search for meaning, with all the ethical and existential implications that this entails (cf.

Francis, [Address to the G7 Session on Artificial Intelligence](#), 14 June 2024).



Politics cannot ignore a challenge of this magnitude. On the contrary, it is called to respond to many citizens who rightly look with both confidence and concern at the issues raised by this new digital culture.

During the Jubilee of the Year 2000, [Saint John Paul II](#) indicated Saint Thomas More as a witness for political leaders to revere and an intercessor under whose protection to place their work. Sir Thomas More was a man faithful to his civic responsibilities, a perfect servant of the state precisely because of his faith, which led him to view politics not as a profession but as a mission for the spread of truth and goodness. He “placed his public activity at the service of the person, especially the weak and poor; he handled social disputes with an exquisite sense of justice; he protected the family and defended it with strenuous commitment; and he promoted the integral education of youth” (Apostolic Letter [E Sancti Thomae Mori](#), 31 October 2000, 4). The courage he showed by his readiness to sacrifice his life rather than betray the truth makes him, also for us today, a martyr for freedom and for the primacy of conscience. May his example be a source of inspiration and guidance for each of you!

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your visit. I offer my prayerful good wishes for your work and upon you and your loved ones, I invoke God’s abundant blessings.

Thank you to all of you. God’s blessings upon you and your work. Thank you.

